796 While some of this feasting is now less orgiastic than in the past, "azmari" musicians still pass among the feasters, singing praises to the host and noble guests, [534] to the accompaniment of the single-string "masenqo" of male singers, and the banjo-like "qrar" fingered by women azmari. Torchlight parades, both of men and of women, leave the bonfire later, wind toward the nearest river or brook (still full though no longer raging) to enjoy the pleasure of bathing at its best, before the brooks dry to a trickle.

796 Thus the first church function of the year is an ● 182 important factor in unifying this society: significant for all ages, both sexes, all classes; sets a time and place for rites of passage in the life cycle; renders visible paternalistic feudal patterns of human relationships; reopens the annual cycle of economic endeavors (caravans, weaving, etc.); reopens the pattern of kin visiting after the hibernation of 3 months; and reinforces the traditional religious as well as national values and attitudes.

796 In the months that follow there are several religious festivals, which also have social significance. Named after special saint's days, they vary from region to region.

The next widely observed holy day is Christmas, on the 29th day of the month of Tahsas. This does not nearly approach the significance it has in the Western 796 world, nor the Masqal feast just described. In fact, 526 Christmas, "Ledät" (lit. birthday) is more often refer-

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

X794 more tricky but less powerful than hers. This enables her to relieve
756 the sufferings of her clients; without, however, curing them. For a possessive spirit can be turned into an asset - into a protective spirit once the spirit's demands are known and regularly fulfilled. Why should anyone wish to reject such a protective spirit who helps solve the problems of life and even "beautifies the face" with an inner glow? Only a few hopelessly evil demons, mostly female, need to be exorcised.

X794 Women, otherwise limited in cultural participation among the Amhara,
562 particularly in the church institution where their expressive behavior and opportunity for service are almost entirely rejected, constitute a considerable majority in the zar societies, even in the top leadership; so that many men think of the zar cult as predominantly feminine, and consult zar doctors by stealth only, at night. Men have ambivalent feelings about their wives attendance: they are often jealous of the "possessive" spirit; object to the financial outlays demanded by the "zar" spirit on pain of "relapse" into the patient's catatonic, schizoid or hysterical state; object to their wives being at the doctor's hut all night during worship-sessions; but admit that their wives are thereafter easier to live with, indeed more beautiful when the "mecābi" (inspiration) "is on their face".

[182] Thus the "zar" institution affects many other Amhara institutions: Marriage and the Family; Religion; Economics; Ethnic Relations; and even linguistics.

X794 The psychological attitude in Amhara culture which emphasizes the
755 aspect of possession in love, and in other intense human relations, has
[832] already been pointed out in connection with "love magic", which attempts, instead of arousing love in the partner, to render him or her submissive.

776 Foreign observers, citing early European parallels, have often
174 wondered whether the Christian Church of Abyssinia has replaced the
797 pre-Christian spirits with angels and saints, demoting the pre-Christian spirits to demons. Except for the "ganyen"- where this attempt is still far from successful - only one foreign scholar has traced such a replacement, in Abyssinia. While studying the celebrations of the Birth of the Holy Virgin in Abyssinia, he noticed certain features which led him to think that his holiday is used to obliterate an old "pagan" cult of outdoor spirits. [127]

Thus the predominant factor is still one of syncretism.

756 E. The Characteristic Significance of Amhara Healing of the Spirit.

The Abyssinian practitioner of magic is first and predominantly a healer (with the minor exception of the despised täqway sorcerer). He is a healer of individual patients, rather than of society.

171 Thus the social significance is at most secondary. The only
● [182] exception, the "zar society", is primarily "group therapy". There is only tangential contact with political, legal, administrative institutions and their function. This is very different from the "society of sorcerers" among the Bemba of Northeast Rhodesia, who hold the people in terror and exercise political power. [128]

[794 562] While the "zar societies" are female-dominated in quantity of members and in leadership, males are by no means excluded. They therefore differ considerably from the "female witches society" among the Nupe of Northern Nigeria. [129]

171 The only close parallel between Amhara concepts of magic and
754 other African concepts of magic is between the "buda" complex of the

127. Tubiana, J: Un Culte des Génies Agreste en Ethiopia". Rassegna di Studi Etiopici, Vol. XIII, pp. 76-90. December 1954
128. Richards, A.I.: A Modern Movement of Witchfinders. Africa, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1935
129. Nadel, S.F.: Witchcraft and Anti-Witchcraft in Nupe Society. ibid

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

P A R T VII: Concluding Observations about Amhara Culture and Society.

181

1. Predominant Ecological Characteristics: Peasant Folk Society.

Parts I and II of this study have shown how the Amhara people on the highland plateau of Northern Ethiopia utilize their generous physical environment to fulfill their ecological needs, with a minimum of tools and considerable reliance upon the ethnic division of labor.

Their ecology is primarily that of an agricultural peasantry. They share with peasants the world over certain near-universal characteristics, in the sense of Redfield's definition of a peasant as a person who controls land and practices agriculture as a way of life, not as a business for profit (footnote 131).

182 They also share certain characteristics of cultural integration with other folk societies. With regard to the latter, Kroeber remarks:

> "Folk societies .....belong to that group of societies which identify themselves with their locality, in contrast to the sophisticated city dwellers who float without roots but take pride in living in their era and day and are therefore subject to the play of fashion".
>
> (footnote 132)

This explains, at least in part, the strong regional emphasis, (down to small sub-districts) among the Amhara, indicated many times in this study.

The historian might approach analysis of Amhara culture by totalling its material and non-material traits. This might then appear to be an unbalanced conglomerate. But it seems supremely

Footnote 131: Redfield, Robert: Peasant Society and Culture. 1956
Footnote 132: Kroeber: Anthropology. 1948. p. 282

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

182 coherent and integrated to the Amhara. Such a point of view is not unique, as has been pointed out by Kroeber:

> "...most of what is in any culture was produced outside of it, but the highly composite product nevertheless is regularly felt as something coherent and integrated, and normally accepted as 'right'.
> ...the average individual (is) so molded by it in growing up...that even incoherences and contraditions are taken for granted as if they were logically sound and a-prieri evident...
> ...(He) accepts the surrounding atmosphere as a fish accepts water. What is 50 years old in this culture and what is 3000 years old touch him alike and affect him alike. So do elements that the culture originated and elements which were introduced into it."
> (footnote 133)

From a sociological point of view, one might describe Amhara society as "tradition-directed" in the terminology of David Riesman (footnote 134). Certainly their old norms are still intact. Even the recently "modern-educated" minority has not yet experienced "anomie".

2. How Amhara Culture functions in Amhara Society.

181 How Amhara culture fulfills the non-material needs of Amhara society, may be summarized under three headings: A. Ethos and major values; B. specific culture foci; C. summary of psychological considerations predominant in Amhara culture.

A. Ethos and Major Values: the Possessor and the Possessed.

Ethos and systems of values have been variously defined; e.g.

"..the direction in which the culture is oriented...

"It is evident that the ethos of culture is pretty close to what

Footnote 133: ibid, pp. 286-8.
Footnote 134: Riesman, David: The Lonely Crowd. 1950.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

Ethiopic verse becomes most obscure in the figure known as *wesṭa wayrā* ("inside of olive tree"). Here only the wax is given, and the listener must work to unearth the gold. Often this can be done only when the circumstances under which the verse was made up are known. The author of a *wesṭa wayrā* often refuses to reveal anything that may help the listener to grasp its hidden meaning.

The expression *wesṭa wayrā* alludes to the fact that the inner core of the olive tree is a hard substance encased by bark of a different color. The implication is that the inner sense of a *wesṭa wayrā* poem is concealed by a veneer which conveys a quite different sense and is difficult to penetrate. This figure is thus especially suitable for expressing insults in a safe way and for esoteric philosophical or religious message. Here is an instance of the latter usage:

Ya-bāhetāwi ǝǰǰ sifalleg lǝ'ullennā
Ya-ḳristosn mesht talānt washama-nnā
Qeṭal betābalaw hono qarama-nnā.

The son of a hermit, high rank to display,
Made love with Christ's wife yesterday;
When she fed him leaves he wasted away.

The surface meaning of this tercet describes an ambitious man who had relations with "Christ's wife" in order to raise his status, for in Ethiopia having relations with a woman of high rank is one way to gain prestige. Instead of advancing his position, however, this man lost all his power when the woman fed him (medicinal) leaves. The esoteric meaning, on the other hand, refers to the experience of a hermit. His "son" is intended to symbolize his hunger, and "Christ's wife" symbolizes fasting. The "inside" meaning, the gold, is therefore that the hermit's hunger is heightened by its relations with fasting, but it diminishes when he is fed leaves, the hallowed diet of a hermit.

The mode of the various poetic figures collectively designated as *sam-ennā warq* is intellectual rather than sensuous. The chief delight of Ethiopic poetry is to attain a maximum of thought with a minimum of words. This effect is reached, as we have seen, through subtle allusions and plays on words. The point may be a serious moral comment, the understanding of which requires one to decipher hidden references to biblical passages or sacred legends; or it may be a jest about love based on a pornographic pun. In any case, the more ingeniously compact and obscure the construction of the verse, the more pleased will be the poet and his audience. Weighty (i.e., mysterious) verse is the ideal, for as the Amhara say, "weighty verse, like heavy clothing, warms the insides."

The creation of the wax and gold figures was an integral part of the development of *qenē*, the genre of verse composed to be sung at the conclusion of devotional services in the church. And *qenē* appears to be a specifically

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

words often carry *double-entendre* as a matter of course; when he listens, he is ever on the lookout for latent meanings and hidden motives. As one of my Ethiopian colleagues has said: "Wax and gold is anything but a formula—it is a way of life."

In essence, wax and gold is simply a more refined and stylized manifestation of the Amhara's basic manner of communicating. This manner is indirect, often secretive. Amharic conversation is larded with vague remarks like *Mīn yeshāllāl?* ("What is better?") when the speaker has failed to indicate what is the issue at hand, or *Tādyās!*, an interjection which can mean almost anything. Often, when the speaker is then quizzed about the issue at hand, he will give an answer that does not reveal what is really on his mind at all, and even when he does, the person with whom he is talking is likely to interpret his response as a disguise.

Wax and gold embodies this fundamental indirection in speech by means of the studied use of ambiguity. Apart from its literary and religious manifestations, wax and gold appears in the common life of the traditional Amhara on a variety of occasions and serves a number of diverse functions.

It provides the medium for an inexhaustible supply of humor, among a wry people who prefer the clever, double-edged remark to comic actions or incongruous situations. This includes the wit of daily life—the invention of puns and sly retorts, the telling and retelling of good anecdotes and famous lines—as well as the more formalized humor on festive occasions, where minstrels sing the *sam-ennā warq* verses extemporized by the guests.

It provides a means for insulting one's fellows in a socially approved manner, in a culture which requires fastidious etiquette in social relations and punishes direct insults by heavy fines. *Sam-ennā warq* insulting, too, has its more stylized expressions, as at the drink-house, where one may find persons competing in a prolonged exchange of more or less disguised insults, or in time of political or military conflict, when opposing lords were wont formerly to satirize one another with ambiguous couplets.

It provides a technique for defending the sphere of privacy against excessive intrusion, in a social order that thrives on rumor and gossip and puts most of its people at the mercy of superiors. While vague and evasive responses often suffice to dampen the enthusiasm of the tax collector or the curious neighbor, *sam-ennā warq* constitutes another potent weapon of self-defense.

Finally, it provides the one outlet for criticism of authority figures in a society which strictly controls every kind of overt aggression toward authority, be it parental, religious, or political. Thus it has been a safety valve for certain social tensions, enabling, for example, witty individuals to satirize the monarch himself and still live to repeat the witticism—so long as its subject was himself duly appreciative of the cleverness of the lines.

[MANZ]

29 / *The Legacy of Manz and Gondar*

The history and customs of Manz are more obviously related to its geography than is the case with Gondar. The encircling wall of mountains has been a source of isolation and protection, two factors of great moment in the history of the area. Peculiar eating and clothing habits have developed in response to a climate which, owing to the altitude of Manz and its position at the edge of an escarpment that leads down to a desert of the Rift Valley, is one of the coldest in Ethiopia. The temperature often approaches the freezing point, and in the colder months (October and November) standing in the sunshine at high noon is no defense against a shrill wind that pierces the bones.

Barley is the only crop that thrives in the highest parts of Manz, though wheat, beans, peas, and chick-peas grow in the slightly lower altitudes. But *tĕff*, the grain preferred by Abyssinians for the preparation of their staple food —a kind of pancake known as *ĭnjarā*—cannot be cultivated at those heights, so the Manzē typically eats *ĭnjarā* made of barley.

Sheep are a major item in the Manz economy. The average farm has a herd of 100 to 150 sheep, which provide a heavy wool as well as the Manzē's favorite meat. This wool is used to make the *bānnā*, a warm blanket which is wrapped around the body and constitutes the standard dress of the Manzē. The *bānnā* distinguishes him from other Abyssinians, who wear a white cotton toga called *shammā*. Wealthier men wear the *barnos*, a tailored cape made of dark wool. Manzē wool is also used for the weaving of rugs which ornament the homes of the well-to-do.

No dyes are used in working their wool, so a crowd of Manzēs in natural-colored *bānnā* seen at a distance resembles a flock of their sheep. This is one of the touches contributing to the impressive aesthetic unity of the Manz landscape. The effect is also produced by the fact that the Manzē's house is built of stone, the same stone that is seen everywhere on the terrain; and its conical roof is made of thatch, which makes the roof look like the piles of grain in the fields. The churches are also built of stone with thatched conical roofs. Everything one sees in Manz bespeaks a harmony with the natural environment.

The cold climate of Manz is invigorating. It prevents food from spoiling quickly and discourages diseases which flourish in lower altitudes. The Manzē boasts that his climate keeps people healthy and gives them long lives, and indeed it is not uncommon to find men sprightly in their eighties and nineties. But only the hardy survive, for life there is as rugged as the land, and the people—like their landscape—are stony, bleak, and full of dark recesses.

Manz does not occupy so conspicuous a place in Ethiopian history as Gondar. Indeed, most books on Ethiopia do not even mention the area. While

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

622 621 794 rounding a local church, and therefore "parish" may be the more appropriate term for it than village. The *chĭqā shum* and the local church authorities work closely on occasion, particularly in connection with the construction and maintenance of church buildings.

*565 79 • 182 The church represents the third main link between the peasant hamlet and the broader Abyssinian life. As the peasant depends on the local market to mediate between his production unit and the external economy, and on the *chĭqā shum* to mediate between his domestic polity and the higher political authorities, so he depends on the local clergy to mediate between his home culture and the "high culture" of Abyssinia as embodied in the institutions of the Orthodox Church.

The peasant supports the church by following its main ritual requirements and by contributing, according to his means, a certain quantity of grain each year. If the peasant works land owned by the church, a considerable part of his produce is transmitted automatically to individual priests, or gifts are offered to the church according to the occasion. In return, the church symbolizes for him the integrity of his moral order and provides moral support during personal crisis.

*565 Such, in broad outline, is the structural setting of peasant life among the Amhara.

THE WORLD OF ACTIVITY

*565 512 ### *The Daily Round*

[462] [252] Work begins in the peasant's home well before daybreak. His wife or maidservant rises with the first cockcrow to grind grain. It is pitch dark as she feels her way across the earthen floor and begins to push and pull a large flat stone over little heaps of barley, wheat, or *tĕff*.

An hour or two later cold light seeps in through cracks in the door and, if it is in bad repair, the thatched roof. The noises of chickens and livestock become more audible, and the rest of the household begins to stir. The man [782] of the house starts his day by reciting a prayer or, if he has some education, by reading a passage from some sacred text. Then he or one of the boys takes [231] [462] the oxen and cows out for breakfast, to a pile of hay in the yard or a spot of pasture rich with grass. Donkeys, mules, and perhaps horses are also sent to graze.

[372] One of the women pokes the embers that spent the night under a blanket of ash. She blows them into flame through a bamboo pipe, filling the room [262] with smoke and her eyes with tears. Over the fire she sets a clay pot to warm [252] up leftover pepper sauce. The peasant sits on a sheepskin spread over the clay [352] bench that adjoins the wall. Water is poured from a gourd for him to wash [515] his hands, and *ĭnjarā* and sauce are brought for his breakfast. He eats by him- [264] self, slowly, pondering the work for the day.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

Egyptian mosques; youth dormitories and community houses in certain tribes in India; the academic and athletic youth organizations of ancient Athens and Sparta; not to mention the numerous teen-age associations of modern Western society.[3]

Here again, the adolescent Amhara is not involved in any such social forms. The advent of puberty is associated with the growing up and out of childhood groups, the gangs of shepherds who spend their days together in work and play. The girl of eleven or twelve is expected to spend all her time at home, under careful supervision. The boy of thirteen or fourteen has abandoned the shepherd's life for farming, in the company of older relatives, and soon becomes increasingly preoccupied with his private economic and erotic interests. His family elders are likely to warn him not to make friends with other youths outside the family.[4] For a number of adolescent boys to get together outside of festive occasions is, to the traditional Amhara mind, a sign that something wrong is afoot.

The absence of adolescent rites and age groups reflects the individualistic character of Amhara social organization, a subject to which we shall turn in chapter vii. Nevertheless, Amhara society catches young people in its grasp and guides them to adulthood just as firmly and surely as does a society which has many collective arrangements for its adolescents. It does this by means of a well-ordered program for growing up. The road from childhood to adulthood is one series of informal, unproblematic stages through which the growing person adjusts to progressively increased responsibilities and progressively detailed norms. After infancy, there is normally no break in continuity in the whole process.

Toward Adult Work Roles

Following a long and indulged infancy, the Amhara child is early taught the rudiments of work responsibility. At the age of three or four, children are given simple chores, such as shooing chickens from grain drying in the sun or collecting bits of firewood. Somewhat older children are expected to protect the crops against birds, farm animals, and baboons. The Amhara becomes apprenticed in the main vocation of his childhood—tending the herds—almost as soon as he can run about, and six-year-old shepherds play a crucial part in the Amhara economy.

Boys retain the responsibility for tending the herds at least until the age of twelve, but by then they have already been initiated into a number of adult work activities. At about eight or nine years the Amhara boy begins to do his share of the harvesting, sickling the wheat, barley, *tĕff*, or beans and loading the crops in piles he will help transport to the threshing place. He becomes adept at directing the cattle round and round the threshing floor and at winnowing the grain from the chaff. At times he helps with the weeding.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

than half the secondary students questioned, and well over a third of the college students, stated that the number of their friends was only one, two, three, or four. 883* 178 592

Almost all the students indicated that they prefer close, intimate, and enduring friendships to casual, impersonal, and frequently changing relationships. There is thus something of the traditional *goramsā*'s companion about these relations, in that these boys define their friends as confidants, as individuals with whom they can disclose "secrets" and discuss personal problems. But the modern relationship is much broader, for it also includes such activities as studying together; going on walks; playing athletic games; going to the movies; visiting the brothels; talking about education, life, and the future; seeing the sights around town.

The great sociological significance of these small clusters of companions, or *bālīnjarā* as they are called, is that they play a crucial part in mediating the transition from a childhood that is essentially traditional, despite exposure to certain modern subjects in school, to an adulthood that will be lived essentially in the modern sector. At the same time that they help the newcomer adjust to each local school community, they are helping him adjust to the broader subculture of modernizing Ethiopia—explaining the strange things and ideas he encounters; correcting his behavior, for example, by showing the proper use of silverware at the table; and refining his language, when necessary, from that of the rustic to that of the urbanite. Their creative function is no less important. Through countless conversations, some idle and some intense, they work to interpret and integrate stimuli coming from many sources—from movies; magazines; the example of Europeans living in Ethiopia; the behavior of government officials, as well as from their teachers—and thus form a sort of buffer between the lone adolescent and the various authoritative influences in his life. 883* 178 592 182

Despite the radical changes in the position of the Amhara adolescents described above—their complete dependence on the government school system, their tutelage under foreign instructors, and their great reliance on age-mates—the traditional pattern of adolescent submission to parental authority still runs strong. Even though most students live as boarders or in rented quarters, they maintain contact with their parents on occasional visits or at vacation time. However far removed, they remain deeply attached to their families and sensitive to the wishes of their parents. How to acquire money to send to their families is often a dominant concern in their lives. Though in most cases the parents can not provide meaningful orientation regarding adjustment to changing conditions in Ethiopia, they do give advice about how their children should behave and try to keep them faithful to traditional norms. The fact 883* 178 593

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

that parents still wield considerable moral influence over the modern adolescents, more so even than their peers, is shown by the figures in Table 3. This persistence of parental influence keeps the Ethiopian adolescent anchored in his traditional culture and accounts in part for a noticeable conservatism among Ethiopian students generally. With respect to such matters as morality, etiquette, family solidarity, and religion, students are strongly inclined to follow their parents' precepts.

While this deep-grained attachment to their parents gives the modern adolescents a sense of stability and security, it is also responsible for considerable strain in their lives. For there are few families—less than three per cent of our sample—in which the students do not remark some significant area of disagreement between their parents and themselves. The modest steps toward modernity that Ethiopia has taken have already kindled a smoldering conflict between generations, perhaps for the first time in Ethiopian history. It is against that background of conflict that we now examine the condition in changing Ethiopia of the three main sociological functions of adolescence: preparation for adult work roles, preparation for marriage roles, and integration into the adult intellectual and moral order.

TABLE 3

RELATIVE INFLUENCE OF PARENTS AND FRIENDS ON STUDENTS

Extent to Which Students Say They Follow Advice	Secondary School		College Males (per cent)
	Males (per cent)	Females (per cent)	
Of parents:			
Always	46	35	17
Usually	43	60	65
Not often	11	5	18
Of friends:			
Always	19	8	8
Usually	47	61	53
Not often	34	31	39
Number	(396)	(40)	(197)

Preparation for Work

The most conspicuous function of the secondary schools and colleges in Ethiopia is to train young people for careers unknown in their traditional

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

society: to create engineers and mechanics, doctors and nurses, economists and educators. With regard to the familiar occupations of the old order, the schools' task is to engender a new breed of practitioner—farmers versed in modern methods of agriculture, soldiers disciplined and geared to modern techniques, clergy cognizant of ecumenical Christianity, clerks who can type and take shorthand, and government officials with some modern education.

What is most revolutionary is that the schools introduce not only new subject matters for careers, but the very notion of vocation itself—of life work as

TABLE 4

SOURCES OF FUTURE SATISFACTION CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT BY STUDENTS*

Source from Which Students Expect Most Satisfaction in Life	Secondary School				College Males (per cent)	
	Males (per cent)		Females (per cent)			
	1st choice	2d choice	1st choice	2d choice	1st choice	2d choice
Career or occupation	34	12	30	9	44	17
Improvement of local community	30	27	16	36	22	28
Religious beliefs and activities	13	20	16	21	5	7
Participation in national and international affairs	10	24	13	20	8	26
Family relationships	8	10	20	9	17	14
Leisure-time, recreational activities	5	7	5	5	3	8
Number	(394)		(40)		(195)	

* Based on question 27 in the Gillespie-Allport questionnaire.

something which one *chooses,* trains for in a specific manner, and derives satisfaction from pursuing.* This orientation departs radically from the traditional expectation of inheriting the work of one's father as a matter of course. Whereas, as we have noted, the Amhara son traditionally carried on his father's work, except in rare cases where there were special reasons for not doing so, only *seven per cent* of the boys in my sample indicated that

* When asked what they expected to give most satisfaction in their lives, the students most frequently named "career or occupation" (out of six alternatives). When asked what they considered most desirable in choosing an occupation, they named "work that is really interesting" most frequently (out of six alternatives). See Tables 4 and 5.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

the contemporary church hierarchy, the *dabtarā* stressing their special intellectual qualification for high positions, the monks their greater piety.

The Traditional Balance

Whatever the internal fragmentation of the church—which was compounded by regionally based doctrinal controversies—it may for the moment be considered as a unified estate vis-à-vis the secular powers. This permits us to raise the question of the integration of politico-military and religious elites in traditional Abyssinian society, a question that may be discussed in terms of two relationships: that between the values represented by the two elites, and that between the interests of their respective institutions.

The social teachings of the Ethiopian Church were couched in terms of practical justice, not universal love. Thus the pacifistic strain in Christianity barely made itself felt. The priests, to be sure, were forbidden to shed blood, animal or human; but this is more in the nature of a necessity for the maintenance of ritual purity than a symbol of moral principle. They went along willingly to the battlefield in ceremonial capacity. In fact, comments d'Abbadie, most of them would reject the interdiction of their taking part in military expeditions as a denial of their rights.[80]

Far from opposing warfare, Ethiopian Christianity served rather as an inspiration and justification for wars; since much of the fighting was directed against Muslim, Judaic, or pagan peoples, the warfare took on something of a crusading tone. As for internecine war, it was commonly justified in terms of *lex talionis*, a religiously sanctioned punishment for the sins of the enemy. In this respect, then, the two elites gave impressive support to each other. The warlords were serving the church by fighting the heathen. The fate of their military expeditions, on the other hand, was assisted by the prayers of the accompanying clergy. This reciprocal dependence was symbolized by the custom of taking some *tābot* along with the army to the battlefield, and by the custom of "greeting" the church as the first thing a warrior does when he returns home.

The values of warfare and religion were further harmonized by the symbolism of the emperor, Lion of Judah. The emperor combined in his person the figures of indomitable warlord and devout—and divinely guided—Christian. This combination was an integral part of the self-image projected by many emperors, as reflected, for example, in the identification with Constantine the Great manifested by Zar'a Yā'qob and Eskender (1478-94) in their choice of throne name, and by Tēwodros II in his coronation speech.

With regard to civil policy, moreover, the nobility and clergy were in basic accord. Both groups felt a special responsibility for adjudicating disputes. Both felt that their superior status entitled them to receive substantial amounts of rent and revenues from lands granted them by the king, and to

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innumerable gifts and services from the rank and file of the peasantry. Differences normally arose only when the secular powers deviated from what were generally the established norms. Thus, certain extremes of exploitation were on occasion strongly condemned by the clergy—usually the monks—as were certain transgressions of Christian custom by the secular powers, including at times the emperor himself. Amda Tseyon (1314–44), for example, was publicly rebuked, early in his reign, for having seduced one of his father's concubines and two of his own sisters. More generally, the clergy tended to react against flagrant misbehavior on the part of the military—such as looting the homes of those giving them quarter, or violating the right of asylum.

The extent to which the religious and secular powers stood in economic conflict seems to have depended largely on the amount of land available at any given time. Both groups were interested in the acquisition of rights to land revenues. The rights of the church to land are anchored in a traditional agreement, attributed to Yekuno Amlāk (1270–85), according to which the church was to receive one-third of the land in the realm. It is clear that the holdings of the church grew progressively larger from that time to the sixteenth century. With the subsequent diminution of Abyssinian territory and related social disorganization, the church's claim to its lands was not so scrupulously respected. Thus, Barradas observed that the emperors of the seventeenth century were as anxious to regain lands from the church for distribution to their soldiers as those of previous centuries had been generous in presenting them, while Takla Hāymānot decreed in 1771 that "all lands and villages, which are now or have been given to the Abuna by the King, shall revert to the King's own use."[51] Tēwodros, too, was anxious to recapture as much land as he could from the church. Later in the nineteenth century, however, as Menelik carried out his great territorial expansion, the church systematically acquired one-fourth of all lands in the annexed areas.

In general, it may be said that the clergy and nobility worked to further each other's interests. The nobility supported the clergy by giving endowments to churches and monasteries, setting up churches in newly conquered lands, and observing religious ceremonies as state functions. The clergy, in turn, served secular authority by providing a communications network for relaying and supporting official policies, excommunicating enemies, and providing counsel and morale in connection with military expeditions. Altogether, there was an easy commerce between the two elites. They felt common cause in their responsibilities and privileges vis-à-vis the masses. Occasionally there was even an exchange of personnel, when warlords ended their careers by becoming monks, or clerics acceded to high civil positions, like the Rās of Angot, for example, who in Alvares' time was an ordained priest.

When expectations of mutual support were not satisfied, however, conflict

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the Amharic phrase *ya-kantu weddāsē zaman*—"the era of futile flattery."

For, whatever other aspects of modern culture they have identified with, the locals and returnees are seized with the promise of its first principle: dynamism.[62] Should they join forces, among themselves and with each other, they might create the effective intelligentsia which is indispensable for realizing this dynamism in action. They would play complementary, and equally necessary, parts; the locals contributing their greater drive and closeness to traditional society, the returnees their broader perspective and skepticism toward simplistic answers and total reforms.

There are numerous obstacles to such a progressive development. Some of them represent the persistence among the intellectuals of a number of traditional pan-Abyssinian characteristics which inhibit both the exercise of creative leadership and the capacity for solidary action. The traditional context of these characteristics will be discussed in the chapters which follow. The most conspicuous obstacle, however, has been the manner in which the Ethiopian government has sought to integrate the intellectuals in the social system. This is the subject to which we now turn.

The Role of the Government

In the hierarchy of values which sustained the traditional Abyssinian social order, that of the transcendental religious orientation represented by the Orthodox Church may be said to have held the paramount position. This is the sense in which, as has so often been remarked, religion has been Abyssinia's only truly unifying factor throughout the centuries. Religious charisma transferred from foreign sanctuaries—the mythical Ark of the Covenant brought from Jerusalem and the archbishop periodically imported from Egypt—provided the ultimate source of legitimacy in the society, upholding the authority of a sacred Christian monarch, church-defending warlords, and a numerous and functionally differentiated clergy. It so penetrated the social system that the basic unit of Abyssinian civil life was in fact a religious one, the parish.

In retrospect it would seem that the most profound aspect of Haile Selassie's accomplishment has been to dislodge the transcendental religious value from highest place and to replace it with the system-integrative value of loyalty to the emperor.[63] His mission has been above all a secularizing one. To accomplish it he has had greatly to increase his political and economic resources; but insofar as his regime has been accepted, and not based exclusively on sheer power—which to some extent is certainly the case—the paramount value in Ethiopia under Haile Selassie has become loyalty to the emperor as a symbol of the whole society. The autonomous significance of the church has been reduced; its extra-Ethiopian source of charisma has been cut off, and its func-

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155 a matter of course. In the more covert forms of expression, however, insulting
521 is a favorite practice among Amhara. Ambiguous language and obscure
578 allusion make possible a good deal of socially admissible, and admired, insult-
[195] ing. It is chiefly due to his mastery of this genre that the Amhara have come
to idealize Alaqā Gabra Hānnā who, in the words of a psychologically sophis-
[554] ticated Ethiopian informant, by "skillful use of 'wax and gold' has defiled everything that is sacred in Abyssinian tradition: this includes Mother, God, Emperor, and Patriarch, to say nothing of the ignorant clergy, peasantry, and slaves. Gabra Hānnā . . . is the summation of the oral aggressive trend in every Abyssinian, of which the *dabtarā* in the king's court and the singer in the drink-house are only mediocre representations."

155 Wax and gold is, furthermore, the vehicle for the mode of expression which
578 Erikson calls "oral retention." Just as the Amhara tends to be tight-lipped
[195] and evasive when confronted by questions he does not feel like answering, so he finds pleasure in stubbornly withholding his meaning from his audience through employing figures and allusions which no one can understand. This may be understood as a passive form of oral aggression. For the untutored, however, the active aggressive component is probably more satisfying. Most Amhara males look forward to occasions when they can insult with impunity, such as in victory after the games at Christmas or in the setting of a drink-house, where their skillfully improvised verses are repeated and sung by a minstrel. The oral sadistic spirit of this latter scene has been captured with great fidelity by a contemporary Amhara novelist. Describing the moment in a drink-house when the minstrel begins bowing his one-stringed violin and gets ready to accept verses from the crowd, he writes: "*And now every one of them prepares a bullet of verse, and gets cocked to fire veiled insults.*"[18]

155 Two-way communication among Amhara is frequently colored by a biting
521 and intrusive manner as well. Amharic conversation gravitates toward a highly argumentative style. Casual disagreement, or even neutral deliberation over a common problem, often engenders a kind of protracted bickering
[691] to which the Amhara have given an onomatopoetic name, "*çhiqeçhiq*." In its more institutionalized form, this argumentativeness becomes litigation, which has long been regarded as the national sport of Abyssinia.

691 As the primary means of distributing land-use rights and of reducing the
182 likelihood of resort to violence in personal disputes, litigation serves functions of unmistakable importance in Amhara society. Yet the frequency and intensity with which Amhara take part in litigation suggests that it is motivated by non-rational factors in good part. Litigants have often lost many times the original value of some item under dispute in the course of pursuing litigation over it through the courts for many years. The language and colorful gestures of the court may be observed among Amhara in their homes or

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at social gatherings in the course of discussions about nearly any subject. One cannot but conclude that the Amhara litigate to a large extent because for them it is an intrinsically pleasurable activity. At times, in fact, the forms of litigation are acted out as in a game. *Teṭāyaq*, for example, analogous to the Western process of cross-examination and a beloved feature of traditional court procedure, is sometimes practiced at parties though it has been outlawed in modern courts.[19] Two men will face a "judge" and try to bedevil each other with sly questions and preposterous claims. The content of the dispute is of no matter; it may be sheer nonsense.

Amhara litigants are ingenious at expressing themselves. They do so with gestures, intonation, and timing that achieve considerable dramatic effect. They are delighted to perform at the slightest provocation. The following incident, recorded during a morning at court in Manz, illustrates that dimension of Amhara litigation which consists of the inherently gratifying expression of oral aggression:

> The defendant had been accused of plowing the plaintiff's land without permission. In fact, however, the plaintiff had given the defendant previous permission to plow there—in front of a group of elders who testified accordingly. The judge therefore ruled against the plaintiff. The plaintiff said he would appeal this decision, because the permission he granted had not been registered in the governor's office and, besides, he had some other complaint to bring against the defendant.
>
> At this point someone in the audience rose and said: "That is all. The judge has ruled against you, and the case is finished." Whereupon the plaintiff told this speaker that he should keep quiet, that his speaking out was against the law, that he had bothered him when the case was tried before a lower level judge previously and should bother him no more. Instead of hushing up, the speaker left his position against the wall and stood next to the defendant, asserting that he would speak in behalf of the latter.
>
> The plaintiff then accused this man of talking out of turn. The judge acknowledged this accusation and called for witnesses. Instantly half a dozen or more men jumped to their feet, eyes bursting with excitement and pride as before a battle, and volunteered to witness against the speaker. One by one, with a great show of oratory, they said their pieces against the man who had spoken out of turn. More than once the judge had to urge these witnesses to stop talking after the evidence had been presented. By this time the substance of the original dispute seemed to have been completely forgotten.

Oral Ambivalence

Much as the oral zone is favored by the Amhara as a center for positive gratifications, both of the passive-receptive and the active-aggressive sort, such

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The effect of this literature has not been, as David Riesman suggests is true of the written word generally, an individualizing one. It did not serve to "help liberate the reader from his group and its emotions, and allow the contemplation of alternative responses and the trying on of new emotions."[31] It has served rather to buttress conformity, by rekindling identification with the sacred symbols of the society. Ethiopian religious literature does not invite introspection; it is a corpus to be venerated and solemnly rehearsed. When a devout Ethiopian reads his daily or weekly portion from some writing such as the *Dāwit* (Psalms of David) or the *Weddāssē Māryām* (*Praise of Mary*), he is said to be "repeating" the text—*Dāwit yedaggemāl*. Most of those who learn to read the words of these writings do not understand the Ge'ez in which they are composed.

A similar function has been performed by the secular literature, which runs primarily in praise of royalty and thus has served to uphold the political status quo. The earliest Ethiopian writings are inscriptions of the Aksumite kings dating from the fourth century A.D. Here, in a style that is to persist through the ages, the royal deeds are recounted in meticulous detail and endowed with the highest morality.[32] Ge'ez chronicles were composed in this manner for most of the emperors after the thirteenth century. The earliest specimens of written Amharic consist of hymns in praise of the Emperor Amde Ṣeyon (1314–44).

Two other written works put the capstone on this conservative structure. The *Kebrā Nagast*, the Ethiopian national epic, has served chiefly to legitimate the royal line that came to power in the thirteenth century and to cement once and for all the union of monarchy and church. The *Fetha Nagast*, the traditional legal code based on various canon and civil laws compiled in medieval Egypt, has served not as a working code for the adjudication of court cases but as an embellishment of *de facto* decisions, imparting to the judge an increment of authority by virtue of his ritual of referring to them.

Because of the relative sterility of Abyssinian written literature, art, dance, and music, many observers have concluded that Abyssinian culture provides no outlets for truly creative expression.[33] This judgment is not just. The Abyssinian genius freely discloses itself in the stories, verse, and proverbs that make up its very rich *oral* literature. Within this oral tradition, especially in its verse, a good deal of original expression and personalized commentary may be found.

Ethiopic verse comprises a wide variety of forms which differ according to subject and occasion. Classical *qenē*, Ge'ez verse in praise of some holy figure or political leader, is composed by *dabtarā* on certain religious or political holidays. More playful verses of praise are sung in Amharic by *dabtarā* or minstrels on festive occasions. In such verses the poet may in-

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[For vocabulary words passim see category 116, pp. 5-75, 93-112, 123-157, 168-181, and 195-256.]